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SUBJECT: KABILA NOMINATES PALU CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER POST

REFS: (A) KINSHASA 873; (B) Kinshasa 802

¶1. (U) Late on October 10, President Joseph Kabila nominated Adolphe Muzito to be Prime Minister. Muzito is currently Minister of Budget and a member of the Unified Lumumbist Party (PALU -- "Parti unifie lumumbiste" in French). The nomination was announced 24 hours after a televised address during which Kabila called for national unity and the mobilization of Congolese society to end the conflict in the east and address pressing infrastructure and development needs (ref A).

¶2. (U) The nomination follows the September 25 resignation of Antoine Gizenga, 83, the former Deputy Prime Minister under Patrice Lumumba in 1960-61 and long time PALU leader (ref B). Speculation prior to the announcement focused on whether Kabila would honor the pre-electoral 2006 agreement between his Alliance for the Presidential Majority (AMP -- "Alliance de la majorite presidentielle" in French) and PALU, whereby PALU threw its support behind the pro-Kabila coalition in exchange for the prime minister's post. PALU's support ensured Kabila of additional support in western DRC, and particularly in the PALU stronghold of Bandundu province. By selecting Muzito, a PALU member from Bandundu, Kabila maintained the governmental alliance and avoided a potential east-west political imbalance. A new government, which will require approval by the National Assembly, is expected to be named in the next 1-2 weeks.

¶3. (SBU) Muzito, 51 and a nephew of Gizenga, is a member of the Pende tribe from the Kwilu district of Bandundu. He was named Budget Minister in the Gizenga government in 2006 after serving as a National Deputy in the 2003-2006 transition government. Prior to government service, he was a career financial inspector, working as an auditor for the cement company CINAT in Bas-Congo. He has a degree in Economics from the University of Kinshasa. He is widely seen as a competent technocrat likely selected for his managerial talents and suitability as a PALU candidate within the AMP alliance. A loquacious speaker, Muzito recognizes the need to modernize the DRC economy and improve its investment climate. However, he has occasionally viewed the DRC's current challenges in the context of colonial or Cold War-era politics, rather than current global economic realities.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Despite Muzito's technical credentials on economic and fiscal issues and good working relationships with donors, some have questioned whether he has the political experience and base necessary to address the DRC's enormous challenges. In addition to continuing instability in Eastern DRC, Muzito will need to respond to domestic criticism that the Gizenga administration did not do enough to improve the lives of ordinary Congolese. Two key tests for Muzito on the economic front will be his ability to ensure passage of a sound 2009 budget, currently being drafted, and to move the DRC toward a new IMF program and HIPC completion point as soon as possible. As for dealing with the problem of instability in the East, Kabila, along with Defense Minister Chikez, Interior Minister Kalume, and MFA Mbusa, will continue to take the lead. End Comment.

